

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control,
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2006 (Proposition 84)**

Subregion: NORTH **County:** LASSEN & MODOC

Applicant: PIT RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Project Title: LOWER ASH CREEK RESTORATION PLANNING PROJECT

Reference Number: SNC 070283

PROJECT SCOPE

This is a planning and development project to address restoration of a 3.5-mile reach of lower Ash Creek, a tributary of the Pit River, and 2,400 acres of associated watershed. Pit RCD will cooperate with the California Department of Fish and Game in the development of this project, which is located in the Ash Creek Wildlife Area and lies in both Lassen and Modoc counties. Drainage modifications of the area for agricultural use have led to a single widened and deepened channel, resulting in drying out of the wetlands and lowering of the water table and leading to a conversion of the vegetation from meadow to sagebrush. This has all led to increased erosion and sedimentation of the Pit River. This project would design treatment techniques specific to the area for hydrologic, biological, and recreational resource restoration while maintaining agricultural production. Goals of the implemented project are:

- Stop channel and soil erosion at the site;
- Reconnect the channel with the flood plain;
- Raise the local water table;
- Restore a more fire-tolerant site;
- Improve habitat values for the site.

Activities for successful completion of this planning project include:

- Conduct resource surveys (botanical/wetland, wildlife, fish, soils and hydrology, fuels and silviculture, cultural resources);
- Conduct hydrologic/geomorphic analysis;
- Develop design alternatives based on site assessment and resource surveys;
- Prepare initial study;
- Prepare permits (CDFG 1601, RWQCB WQ Certification, SHPO notification, ACOE 404 permit or nationwide permit notification, USFWS T&E consultation, if necessary);
- Conduct outreach (at least 2 stakeholder field tours).

PROJECT SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Conduct all resource surveys	May 2008
Conduct hydrologic/geomorphic analysis	May 2008
Develop design alternatives	June 2008
Prepare Initial Study	July 2008
Prepare permits	July 2008
Outreach (conduct 2 stakeholder field tours)	August – Sept. 2008
Final Report/Final Payment Request	January, 2009

PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Personnel – District book-keeping/billing	2,000
Permit fees and expenses	1,000
Office expenses	200
Publications	200
Advertising	200
Contract services (Pit RCD Watershed Coordination; hydrologist consultation; GIS services; cultural resources consultation)	50,000
GRAND TOTAL	\$ 53,600

Letters of Support:

- Department of Fish & Game

Recommendation:

Staff recommends funding the requested amount of \$53,600.

SNC 070283 Lower Ash Creek Restoration Planning Project, Project Summary & Budget

The Pit Resource Conservation District (Pit RCD) proposes a planning project to address aquatic, riparian, and upland restoration at lower Ash Creek, a degraded stream and wet meadow system that is located within the western portion of Ash Creek Wildlife Area (WA) in Modoc and Lassen County. The total project area is approximately 2,200 acres. Exact area of disturbance for eventual project implementation will be identified under the proposed study, but will likely be a much smaller area.

The Pit RCD, in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), proposes a “full” stream/wetland restoration strategy for the project area. The Pit RCD and CDFG have worked cooperatively on projects in the Wildlife Area since 1996. The RCD administers the grazing, haying, and farming contracts that occur within the WA. DFG staff conducts day-to-day management. However, due to budget cuts and resulting staff shortages for CDFG at the WA, the ability to manage the area has been compromised. Implementation of this project would reduce management actions needed by wildlife area staff by restoring naturally occurring processes that improve and maintain wildlife habitats. For example, improved conditions include: nesting habitat, in-stream channel diversity, seasonal wetlands, permanent ponds, and meadows with fewer noxious weeds. These improvements require little or no maintenance, are consistent with the WA’s management plan, and are considered long-term benefits. Improved meadow and grasslands (which are managed on the WA with livestock grazing and haying operations) would also result in improved management of such species as sandhill cranes and geese.

The dominant feature of the project site is a dehydrated middle-elevation stream and meadow system. Historically, this ecosystem featured saturated hydric meadow soils and patches of riparian deciduous shrubs along the stream corridor. Channel degradation has effectively drained the meadow and riparian vegetation is no longer present. CDFG has recently toured other regional meadow restoration projects and realizes the many resource benefits that result from full restoration. They have also developed a two-foot contour map of the area, and consulted with stream restoration practitioners about the “pond and plug” technique and its utility on the WA.

A detailed study of the site is now needed to develop the restoration design. Completion of the design can occur this winter with CEQA compliance (i.e., Initial Study Neg. Dec.) and permitting in the spring (i.e. 2008) and construction in the fall of 2008. Although the ultimate funding source for construction is not secured, the State Wildlife Conservation Board has expressed a high interest in restoring Ash Creek within the WA.

The proposed project will deliver a project design that will be used to develop permits and construction bid information (i.e., amount of dirt to be moved, etc.).

The proposed project will directly address seven Sierra Nevada Conservancy program goals: protecting living resources, preserving working landscapes, protecting and improving water and air quality, assisting the regional economy, enhancing public use of lands owned by the public, reducing risk of natural disasters (fire, meadow and stream degradation, and flooding), and providing increased opportunities for recreation and tourism (improve visuals on the Bieber-Lookout Rd.).

Budget: Personnel \$ 2,000; Operating Expenses (permit fees, publication costs, etc.) \$ 1,600; Contract Services \$50,000; **Total sum requested: \$53,600.**